



Texas City Prairie Preserve

A newsletter of The Nature Conservancy of Texas

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Prairie-chicken update: Chicks hatch at TCPP

At booming time this spring there were nine radio-collared captive-bred Attwater's prairie-chickens at Texas City Prairie Preserve – five females and four males. All five of the females mated and nested.

Staff from the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge came out to the preserve eight weeks after hatching to help check on the chicks. Three chicks were located. Two were captured and banded, and one was fitted with a radio collar. The two captured chicks appeared to be healthy and well-nourished.

The breeding facilities have had a good year, and we should be receiving more captive-bred chicks in August. (See article on page 2 about the NASA breeding facility.)



Photo by Jared Judy

This Attwater prairie-chicken chick is one of three that survived from the nest of one of our radio-collared females. It was captured and fitted with its own radio collar.

Master Naturalists tackle projects at the preserve

by Marybeth Arnold, GBAMN



Before



After

Photos by Sara Snell

Starting in May 2006, Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists (GBAMN) expanded their dedication to The Nature Conservancy's TCPP. They already have a birders team that meets every Wednesday and Gib Larson who does just about anything and everything.

GBAMN established a new team called the Texas City Prairie Preserve Passionate People (aka: TC4P), who meet every Tuesday morning. They started by attacking the flowerbeds surrounding the visitors center, clearing the beds of unwanted

continued on page 3

Quasi-Christmas Bird Count results

Twenty-six birders came out for the sixth annual Quasi-Christmas Bird Count on Monday, January 16, 2006. Although not as cold as previous counts, the weather was dreary, misty and windy. That didn't stop the birders from finding the highest count total to date with 107 different species seen by noon. After a delicious hot lunch provided by the preserve staff (and former staff Diane Schenke), the rain prevented more birding. Who knows how many species would have been found if the weather had cooperated, but four additional species had been seen a few days before the count.

It was a good year for waterfowl. American wigeon, redhead, greater scaup and Ross's goose were found for the first time on a TCPP count. In all, 16 different species of duck were identified and one additional species, hooded merganser, was seen on the previous Saturday but not on count Monday. Also found for the first time were Virginia rail and gull-billed tern. Surprisingly, no vultures could be seen that day.

The 2007 count will be held on Monday, January 15. Be sure to save your Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday to spend birding at TCPP.

NASA prairie-chicken facility opens

The Houston Zoo has relocated their Attwater's prairie-chicken breeding facility to the grounds of NASA's Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Clear Lake.

The facility at the zoo near downtown Houston was cramped and noisy. It was adjacent to the children's area of the zoo and across the street from the Texas Medical Center with its ambulances and helicopters. The staff of the zoo wanted a quieter place for the birds to breed.

Officials at NASA volunteered to construct a breeding pen on the JSC property. This spring 24 adult birds were placed in the new pen to boom and mate. As soon as eggs were laid they were transferred to the Houston Zoo to be incubated and reared. Most of the hens then laid a second clutch of eggs. In all, 140 eggs were laid; 110 hatched; and 76 chicks were successfully reared.

Approximately 40 of these chicks will soon be relocated to the Texas City Prairie Preserve. They will be fitted with radio collars and placed in a chain-link holding pen for two weeks before being released. Some of the chicks will be released at the Attwater Prairie-Chicken National Wildlife Refuge and the remaining birds will return to NASA to supplement the breed stock.

Reef ball project progresses

The reef ball shoreline erosion project is progressing with the placement of additional reef balls along the Moses Lake shoreline. On March 5, 18 reef balls were deployed with the assistance of personnel from Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF), NRG Texas, National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and volunteers. We are currently awaiting more molds from the manufacturer. When received, they will be used to make more reef balls to enlarge the artificial reef along the Moses Lake shoreline to protect the marsh.

This project is being conducted in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NRG Texas and the Galveston Bay Foundation.



Eddie Seidensticker (NRCS) drives the front-end loader used to relocate the reef balls to the shoreline for deployment.



Breck Sacra (NRG Texas), center, and Bob Stokes (GBF), left, lift and place a 175-pound reef ball in the shallows of Moses Lake.

A heartfelt Good-Bye and a hearty Welcome

There have been some changes in staff at Texas City Prairie Preserve in the last few months.

Office manager Ruby Gressett has achieved her longtime dream of retiring to the Texas hill country. Ruby's last day at TCPP was April 7. Two weeks later she was settling into her new home in New Braunfels.

As of January 2006, TCPP has a new preserve manager. Jared Judy comes to us from Delaware. As a way of introduction, here is Jared's description of his background.

"After graduating high school in the spring of 1999, I attended the University of Delaware from the fall of 1999 to the spring of 2002, receiving a BS with majors in wildlife conservation and entomology and a minor in plant biology. After already conducting two field seasons of research under a professor in the department as an undergraduate, I decided to stay at UD for graduate school. The project I was working on was a continuation of 27 years of research on a population of wood thrush in a university owned woodlot. My part was to determine the primary causes of fluctuations of abundance and reproductive success for this particular population of birds. I graduated with a MS from the Applied Ecology Department with a focus on avian biology in the winter of 2005.

"After dabbling in teaching high school biology and chemistry for 4 months in the spring of 2005, I went to work for the New Jersey Audubon Society (NJAS) out of Cape May, NJ. I was hired as a field technician doing surveys of a restored grassland at the Atlantic City airport to better understand the distribution of breeding species such as the eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow, upland sandpiper, etc. It was a temporary position that ended in November, so after getting married in October,



Photo by Paula Kennedy

New TCPP preserve manager Jared Judy

my wife and I moved to the Houston area in December of 2005.

"Shortly afterward I saw the preserve manager position posted at TCPP. I applied and heard an immediate response from The Conservancy; they needed someone to start as a technician immediately. So I took the short-term position starting in mid-January as was hired as the full time preserve manager on April 1, 2006."

Jared should have a new assistant soon. Resumes are currently being reviewed and the preserve technician position is expected to be filled in August.

Master Naturalists, from page 1

invasive plants and non-natives. The beds will be replanted this fall with species native to Texas and the prairies that historically occurred in the area. August 15, 2006 will be a dedicated stewardship day for all GBAMN. The beds will be finished and a multitude of other jobs will be started.

Future projects include assisting with the construction of the release pens for the Attwater's prairie chickens, improving the nature walks, assisting with the documentation of flora and fauna at the preserve, and outreach and education in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy.

There is never a lack of challenges to be met at TCPP!

Additional prairie-chicken trackers needed

We are in need of additional volunteers to assist with tracking the radio-collared prairie-chickens on the weekends. Trackers drive the roads of the preserve in the TCPP suburban, stopping at designated locations and use a receiver and antenna to listen for the signals from the collars. A tracking session can take from one to four hours depending on the number of birds. Each tracker is asked to track one day per month.

No previous experience is necessary, however, good hearing is essential.

If you are interested in being a tracker, email Paula Kennedy at paulak@hal-pc.org.

TCPP t-shirts for sale

We have TCPP t-shirts for sale! The shirts have a picture of the rear end of an Attwater's prairie chicken on the back. On the left upper side, the front is printed "The Nature Conservancy of Texas" and "Texas City Prairie Preserve" with a small picture of a prairie chicken. They are available in mustard yellow or leaf green and in sizes small to XXL. Cost is \$15 per shirt, plus \$5 for shipping (for 1 or 2 shirts).

To order, just fill out the form at right and send it in to get your TCPP t-shirt. All proceeds from t-shirt sales will be used at TCPP.



I would like to order _____(no.) TCPP t-shirts. I have enclosed \$15 per shirt plus \$5 shipping.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone #: _____

Shirt #1: size (circle): S M L XL XXL
color (circle): mustard green

Shirt #2: size (circle): S M L XL XXL
color (circle): mustard green

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